Panjgur residents take to streets against rising kidnap cases

By Behram Baloch

GWADAR: Hundreds of people, political workers, traders and members of civil society on Sunday staged a protest rally in Panjgur town against rising incidents of kidnapping for ransom of traders and general people and worsening law and order situation in the area.

The protest call was given by All Parties Citizen Action Committee of Makran against the abduction of prominent figure of the area Gul Jan Rind and many other people in the Panjgur district.

Hundreds of protesters gathered at the main Bismillah Chowk of Panjgur and marched on roads and streets carrying placards and banners inscribed with their demands and anti-government slogans.

The rally was led by APCACM Chairman, Nawab Shambay Zai, JUI Panjgur leader Hafiz Muhammad Azam Baloch, BNP leader Mir Nazir Ahmed Baloch, National Party acting president Mujeeb Rehman, Jamaat-i-Islami leader Maulvi Noor, PML-N leader Ashraf Sagat, Haq Do Tehreek Panjgur leader Mullah Farhad and PPP Panjgur leader Javed Baloch.

The leaders of the protesters demanded the government and law-enforcement agencies to take immediate steps for the safe recovery of Shah Nawaz Gul and other abducted people.

They questioned why, despite availability and presence of modern technology with the law-enforcement agencies, the victim's phone number had not been traced. They demanded immediate arrest of those responsible for the kidnapping and said the protesters have one point agenda and that is safe recovery of Shah Nawaz Gul and other kidnapped people of the area.

They said had the government, district administration and law-enforcement agencies made sincere efforts, Shah Nawaz Gul would have been recovered by now.

They said the law, order situation in the area had become critical and nobody's life, property and honour is safe now in the area, creating an atmosphere of extreme fear among the masses.

They also referred to some previous incidents, including the killing of Waleed Saleh, brother of Rahmat Saleh, whose perpetrators they said were still unknown.

The leaders said that the son of the respected and peace-loving figure Gul Jan was abducted from Turbat about two months ago, adding that democratic and peaceful political forces were repeatedly approaching authorities of the area, but in vain.

They demanded Balochistan chief minister, Inspector General of Police, the Makran commissioner, the deputy commissioner of Turbat, and the DPO of Turbat to take immediate steps for safe recovery of the kidnapped people.

TTAP chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai, accompanied by other leaders, addresses a multiparty conference at the Karachi Press Club.—Shakil Adil/White Star

TTAP seeks treason cases against 'mandate thieves'

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Plight: Challenges, Consensus and the Way Forward', was held at the Karachi Press Club, in which, apart from the TTAP leadership, heads of nationalist parties in Sindh and members of civil society, including professors and lawyers, also participated.

The TTAP delegation, led by its chairman and the newly appointed opposition leader in the National Assembly, Mehmood Khan Achakzai, has arrived in Sindh for four days.

The visit is part of the mobilisation efforts for the nationwide 'street movement' called by the PTI for Feb 8 — now a protest announced by the entire alliance.

'Free and fair polls'

At the event, the MPC demanded transparent elections, stating that public confidence in democracy could only be restored through "free and fair polls".

It called for the immediate appointment of a "neutral" chief election commissioner, an independent probe into the alleged "massive rigging" in the Feb 8, 2024 elections, "identification of those responsible", and their "punishment under Article 6 of the Constitution".

The MPC also called for the release of all political prisoners, including PTI leaders and supporters, as well as Dr Mahrang Baloch and other detainees belonging to the Baloch Yakjehti Committee.

The conference urged that restrictions on meetings with the PTI founder be lifted and that "bogus" cases against Grand Democratic Alliance leader Murtaza Jatoi and the chief of the Sindh United Party, Syed Zain Shah, be withdrawn. The participants also expressed their support for journalists, lawyers and *Dawn*, condemning what it described as the government's economic exploitation to suppress dissenting voices and curtail media freedom.

It also called for the immediate repeal of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca), terming it a "black law".

The MPC condemned the "ongoing practice of enforced disappearances" across the country and demanded that the military operation in Tirah Valley be halted. It also called on the federal government to take provincial governments into confidence on all matters and said issues with Afghanistan should be resolved through "diplomacy".

Middle East

While expressing concern over recent developments in the Middle East, especially in Iran and Gaza, the MPC called on the government to convene an emergency meeting of regional states and a joint session of parliament.

In the resolution, it also rejected alleged proposals to increase the voter age from 18 to 25 years, describing the move as an attack on youth democratic rights.

The MPC also condemned what it called "sustained attacks on judicial independence". It alleged that the "26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments were used to weaken the judiciary through pressure and arbitrary transfers".

Regarding provincial autonomy, the resolution stated that provinces had the first right over their minerals and natural resources, and that international agreements without public consent were "unconstitutional".

It emphasised adherence to the 1991 Water Accord and rejected projects obstructing the natural flow of rivers.

'Respect for all'

Meanwhile, in his address to the conference, opposition leader Achakzai stressed that Pakistan could only be strengthened through respect for all "nationalities, cultures and religions", adding that the federation could not be stable without granting provinces their constitutional rights and control over resources.

Former National Assembly speaker Asad Qaiser said that the mandate was "stolen" in the Feb 8, 2024 elections, adding that the PTI founder had been jailed for over two years in "bogus cases but remained steadfast".

Majlis Wahdat-i-Muslimeen chief Allama Raja Nasir Abbas said that standing against oppression was the duty of every Pakistani. He added that the Constitution reflected people's aspirations, but institutions such as the judiciary, parliament and media were under pressure.

Syed Zain Shah said the country was facing a severe political, economic and constitutional crisis as parliament had become a rubber stamp, while media and judicial freedoms had been curtailed. He added that conditions in Sindh were deteriorating day by day.

Former minister Miftah Ismail, former governor Mohammad Zubair Umar, Barrister Salahuddin Ahmed, senior lawyer Aamir Nawaz Warraich and leaders of nationalist parties in Sindh also spoke at the conference.

It was observed on Sunday that roads leading to the Karachi Press Club were blocked with buses, while police personnel were deployed in the surrounding areas.

Balochistan govt approves Benazir card for farmers

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: The Balochistan government has formally approved the launch of the Benazir Kissan Card in the province to provide financial assistance to farmers and has finalised an agreement with HBL Konnect for its implementation.

Under the agreement, farmers' bank accounts will be opened through HBL to ensure the transparent disbursement of financial assistance. The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Balochistan Secretary Agriculture Noor Ahmed Pirkani, which was attended by Director General Agriculture (Extension) Masood Baloch and other officials.

The meeting was informed that the provincial government would provide financial assistance to farmers from time to time in the form of subsidies. These subsidies will cover the purchase of seeds, fertilisers, agricultural pesticides and farm machinery.

To facilitate farmers, a dedicated webpage titled "Kissan Balochistan" has been developed, allowing farmers to register themselves online. In addition, registration facilities are available at the offices of Deputy Directors Agriculture (Extension) in the relevant districts and through a mobile application named the Benazir Kissan Card.

Officials clarified that farmers who fail to complete the registration will not be issued the Benazir Kissan Card. The meeting was informed that so far, 80,000 farmers have been successfully registered across various districts of Balochistan. However, in districts where the registration process has been slow, the Secretary Agriculture has ordered action against the concerned deputy directors.

First digital test held in province for finance posts

QUETTA: The Balochistan government on Sunday conducted the province's first fully digital, paperless recruitment test for 111 Grade-14 sub-accountant posts in the finance department, with successful candidates issued appointment letters later the same day.

Officials said around 5,600 male and female candidates had applied for the positions, while about 2,500 appeared in the computer-based test held at the Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences.

Finance Secretary Imran Zarkoon told *Dawn* that the results were compiled through a computerised process. He said appointments to the 111 posts were made "purely on merit" and in a transparent manner, adding that appointment letters were issued late at night after completion of the process. Speaking at a ceremony to distribute appointment letters, CM Sarfraz Bugti termed the exercise a "historic milestone" towards transparency.—Staff Correspondent

Civil society alarmed over fast-tracked nicotine rule

By Our Staff Correspondent

QUETTA: Civil society organisations and child rights activists in Balochistan on Sunday called on the federal government to halt the fast-tracking of mandatory standards for nicotine-containing, tobacco-free oral products, warning the move could accelerate addiction among youth in the province.

In a joint statement issued by humanitarian groups, youth networks and civil society alliances, the coalition criticised the move and argued that formalising standards for these products risks legitimising their use.

They contended that regulatory frameworks, while intended to control quality, would likely normalise nicotine consumption rather than reduce harm.

Child Rights Movement Balochistan Coordinator Mir Behram Lehri said any policy facilitating access to addictive substances violates basic child protection principles.

"Children and adolescents must be safeguarded from all forms of nicotine exposure," Mr Lehri said. "This move undermines that responsibility."

The coalition expressed concern that the push for new standards is driven by industry interests focused on exports and commercial growth, potentially overlooking long-term social consequences.

They noted that Balochistan already struggles with poverty and weak regulatory enforcement, making the population particularly vulnerable to health risks.

AID Balochistan's Exectuive Director Adil Jahangi warned that mandatory standards could open the door to wider addiction in communities lacking adequate health safeguards.

Media professionals and youth groups echoed these concerns, cautioning that normalising the products sends a dangerous message to young people.

The civil society alliances demanded an immediate suspension of the standardisation process and urged the government to adopt evidence-based policies that prioritise public health and child rights.

Ulema council hails Gaza peace board invitation

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Ulema Council on Sunday termed US President Donald Trump's invitation to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to join a proposed peace board on Palestine as a major diplomatic success for Pakistan.

Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Ashrafi said the invitation reflected the strength of Pakistan's diplomatic engagement and its sustained efforts to highlight the Palestinian cause at international forums.

He said Pakistan had consistently raised the issue of Palestine across the world, and the move was a recognition of those efforts.

Hafiz Ashrafi praised the manner in which the prime minister, along with the country's top military leadership, presented the Palestinian case before the US president and the international community, calling it commendable and a source of national pride.

He urged PM Shehbaz to accept the invitation and play an effective role in promoting peace, particularly for the betterment of the Muslim Ummah and the people of Palestine. The council chairman added that the development underscored Pakistan's growing relevance in global affairs and would further enhance the country's international standing.—APP

Search begins after fire kills six in Karachi

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an inquiry to determine the cause of the fire and fix responsibility.

Police surgeon Dr Summaiya Syed told *Dawn* that six men, aged in their 20s and 30s, were brought dead to Civil Hospital Karachi. Post-mortem examinations were conducted and the cause of death was declared inhalation injuries and burns, she said.

Moreover, 26 men, aged 18 to 45, were brought for treatment, with 11 suffering burn injuries, she said, adding that all were discharged after first aid as none of them had suffered critical injuries.

She said "mass disaster protocols" had been activated at hospitals after officials provided a list of missing persons, including women and children, and warned that the death toll could rise.

Rescue 1122 spokesperson Hassaanul Haseeb Khan told *Dawn* that they received the initial call at around 1:38am on Sunday. He said rescuers were first told the fire started in a shop dealing in artificial flowers on the ground floor before spreading to the basement and upper levels.

He said the building housed shops containing clothing, plastic goods, suitcases and chemicals used for perfumes and cosmetics, while the top level had a roof and parking area.

Rescue teams, including those from Rescue 1122, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation fire brigade, Pakistan Navy and the Karachi Port Trust, rescued around 50 people safely on Saturday-Sunday night, he said.

Another 20 people were rescued in injured condition, but three later died. Mr Khan said two bodies were recovered from debris late on Sunday night, while a 25-year-old firefighter, Furqan Ali, lost his life when part of the building collapsed and debris fell on him.

He said the intensity of the blaze had weakened the pillars, and the rear portion of the building had already collapsed, with the remaining half of the structure at risk.

Quoting Sindh Building Control Authority officials, he said the building was constructed in the 1990s and an additional floor was added in 2003.

59 missing; Rs25bn losses

South DIG Syed Asad Raza told *Dawn* that police had a list of 59 missing persons. "So far, we have shortlisted seven of them based on their call details," he said, adding that their phones were last traced to the plaza before being switched off.

Sindh Chief Minister Shah, Governor Kamran Khan Tessori, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, IGP Javed Alam Odho and other senior officials visited the site and reviewed the rescue operation.

Meanwhile, All City Tajir Ittehad, an alliance of traders' bodies, said in a statement that its representatives estimated losses of Rs20bn to Rs25bn, including the value of goods and reconstruction costs.

"This is not only the destruction of a building but a source of livelihood for thousands," it said, insisting that over 5,000 people worked in more than 1,200 shops.

President, PM grieve

President Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday expressed sorrow over the death of firefighter Furqan Ali, praising his bravery and offering condolences to the bereaved family, according to a statement from the President's Secretariat. He stressed that fire safety and emergency response systems should be strengthened to prevent such tragedies in the future.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also expressed grief over the loss of life and directed authorities to take all possible steps to protect lives and property. "The affected traders and other victims would be provided with every possible assistance," he said.

PM Shehbaz also spoke to the Sindh chief minister by phone to express sorrow over the loss of lives and offered the Centre's full support to the provincial government.

Govt cites weather among reasons for power outages

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came out with a 5-6 month delay and thus interpretations were based on outdated data.

He said that Nepra wrongly observed that Rs3.23 per unit was an additional burden on consumers, saying it had been in place for years and would have gone on for decades, but the current government announced its continuation for only six years.

Mr Leghari said the regulator also wrongly claimed that higher system losses than regulatory targets were an unnecessary burden on consumers, and said these gaps — both low recoveries and high losses — were being financed by the Ministry of Finance out of taxpayers' money and hence posed no additional burden on electricity consumers.

The minister said the SOIR was a comprehensive document and its draft should have been shared with the power division for fact-checking before its publication.

He said the government had no intention of strangulating the regulator, but capacity improvement was required both at the power division and the regulator. He said the power division would officially write to the regulator to highlight its concerns.

He agreed with the Nepra's projections, indicating a surplus margin of up to 8,700MW, that increased generation costs and higher tariffs, as most of the plants operate under 'take or pay' or 'must run' agreements, but said the installed capacity had passed through due to the regulatory process. The government had introduced a surplus power package for industrial and agricultural consumers at discounted rates for three years to stimulate demand and improve asset utilisation, and positive results emerged in December.

'Without due diligence'

Responding to weaknesses in integrated system planning pointed out by Nepra and its cost to consumers, the minister said that Nepra had been approving the indicative generation expansion plans (IGCEP) without due diligence.

"We have now submitted IGCEP 2025-35, which represents a fundamental shift in Pakistan's approach to power sector planning purely on merit and least cost of energy, thus excluding 7,967MW high-cost and non-essential generation projects and prioritisation of low-cost, indigenous, and renewable energy sources, with a projected saving of $17bn," he said.

The minister confirmed that delays in project execution remained a persistent challenge across several major initiatives in the transmission sector, saying the government has separated the project development function into an independent company, EIDMC, for the timely execution of transmission projects.

He also denied that the power division controlled power companies, saying they were given full autonomy under the board of directors. "In the current year, the fiscal space burden has already been reduced by Rs400bn (from Rs1.287 trillion to Rs893bn) through this process," he said.

He also conceded the past practice of Discos issuing electricity bills with incorrect readings, which was 'a major driver of non-payment, leading to lower recoveries for the Discos'. He claimed that over Rs40bn had been returned to the consumers last year through the introduction of a proportionate billing mechanism (bills no longer than 30 days). He hoped the regulator would soon approve investment plans to enable Discos to introduce automated meter reading (AMR) devices.

He said the Discos' recovery of bills improved from 92.4pc to 96.6pc in FY2025, resulting in Rs183bn reduction in unrecovered bills, falling from Rs315bn in FY24 to Rs132bn in FY25. In FY2026 (Jul-Dec), recovery improved by another Rs43bn compared to last year, he said. On the other hand, the at-source deduction of 25pc from bills of provincial governments and government departments also improved financials.

Circular debt

Contesting the regulator for reporting that circular debt reduction of Rs780bn last year primarily stemmed from external financial injections rather than structural improvements, the minister said the regulator's "understanding with regard to power sector numbers is surprising".

He said the debt reduction was due to lower losses (Rs193bn), waiver of late payment surcharges with power producers (Rs260bn), and Rs300bn due to macroeconomic improvements like exchange and interest rates.

Most importantly, the minister challenged Nepra for claiming that only the private sector distribution company, KE, had not contributed to the circular debt, but its consumers paid the debt servicing surcharge. "K-Electric had contributed to the accumulation of circular debt in the past by not paying electricity dues to CPPA-G. Up to June 2023, the resulting addition to circular debt due to K-Electric's non-payment amounted to Rs640bn.

The receivables from KE stand at more than Rs300bn as on November 30, 2025," the minister said. He added that lenient regulatory targets to improve KE efficiency resulted in more than Rs500bn subsidies to its consumers over the last five years.Responding to Nepra's assessment that the non-affordability factor due to rising electricity tariffs pushed consumers toward conservation and solar alternatives, and that economic stagnation further reduced demand, the minister claimed the average tariff had dropped from Rs53.04 in March 2024 to Rs42.27 per unit in December 2025.